

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
Opening Statement
Oversight Field Hearing
“Restoring Atlantic Fisheries and
Protecting the Regional Seafood Economy.”
Riverhead, New York

December 7, 2015

Today, the Committee will hear how federal decision-making directly impacts local citizens, local economies, and the environment. It is important to review how these decisions are being implemented, and, where needed, correct or improve the laws guiding these decisions.

Today’s hearing helps us perform that vital oversight function—and from outside the D.C. beltway. I commend my New York and New Jersey colleagues – Mr. Zeldin and Mr. MacArthur – for making this hearing possible.

Our public lands and waters should be open to the public. Unfortunately, across the country, access is being eroded by federal agencies that ignore state and local laws, input and science. Some have accused the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or NOAA represented here today, of using political science to justify fishing closures. These decisions have real impacts on local economies, cultures and traditions.

This Committee has heard from many commercial and recreational anglers and the businesses that depend on them about the outdated science and lack of transparency of the agency is its regulatory decisions. It’s a concern that we are working to address. Earlier this year, the House passed legislation to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Act – the law that governs federal fisheries management. H.R. 1335 makes key reforms to reflect scientific advancements and regional needs.

It specifically provides flexibility to the Regional Fishery Management Councils who are charged with managing federal fisheries stocks; it requires the federal government to incorporate state and local data when it comes to making fish population assessments and provides for greater transparency to make sure management decisions are made in an open way. While this bill awaits Senate consideration, I hope it will help bring this law into the 21st century with this legislation. Fishermen deserve the right to fish and that’s what this bill helps give them.

Another issue that threatens public access and local economies on the Atlantic coast and elsewhere is the very real threat of the Administration’s use of the Antiquities Act to designate Marine National Monuments.

While I don’t represent a coastal district, and Utah isn’t the fishing capital of the world, I know firsthand what happens when a President abuses the Antiquities Act against the wishes of

local residents as a means of shutting off multiple uses of lands and waters. This is a tool that President Obama has already used more than any other American president to date. Last year, he expanded the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument from 86,888 to roughly 490,000 square miles – the largest expansion in U.S. history.

Recent disclosures of the plan being considered by the Administration to designate a Marine National Monument off the coast of Cape Cod are deeply concerning. Members of Congress on both sides of the political aisle, have voiced opposition to such actions and called upon the Administration to seek local input on any potential plan. Further, at a recent subcommittee hearing, witnesses testified that fishermen aren't opposed to conservation, but that they want real input, and these sweeping, un-vetted federal decisions should not be tolerated. Federal management decisions need to be informed by experts at the regional level, in full consultation with states and local users – not under the cover of darkness.

So far, we've received very few answers from this Administration to questions about its plans regarding these designations, stoking fears that before the end of his term, the President will, with the stroke of a pen, render much of the Atlantic coast and other areas off-limits to fishing access. This is unacceptable. Sensible and open policies foster economic growth and conservation and help create jobs and put food on the table. In my part of the world, there's a saying that if you have no farms, you have no food. The same can be said that if you have no boating access, you have no fish.

Today's hearing is about finding ways to help the fishing communities on Long Island and in New Jersey so that your towns, your region and our nation can prosper together. I want to thank the audience and our witnesses today for being here. I look forward to today's hearing and once again thank Mr. Zeldin and Mr. MacArthur for their leadership in this effort.